

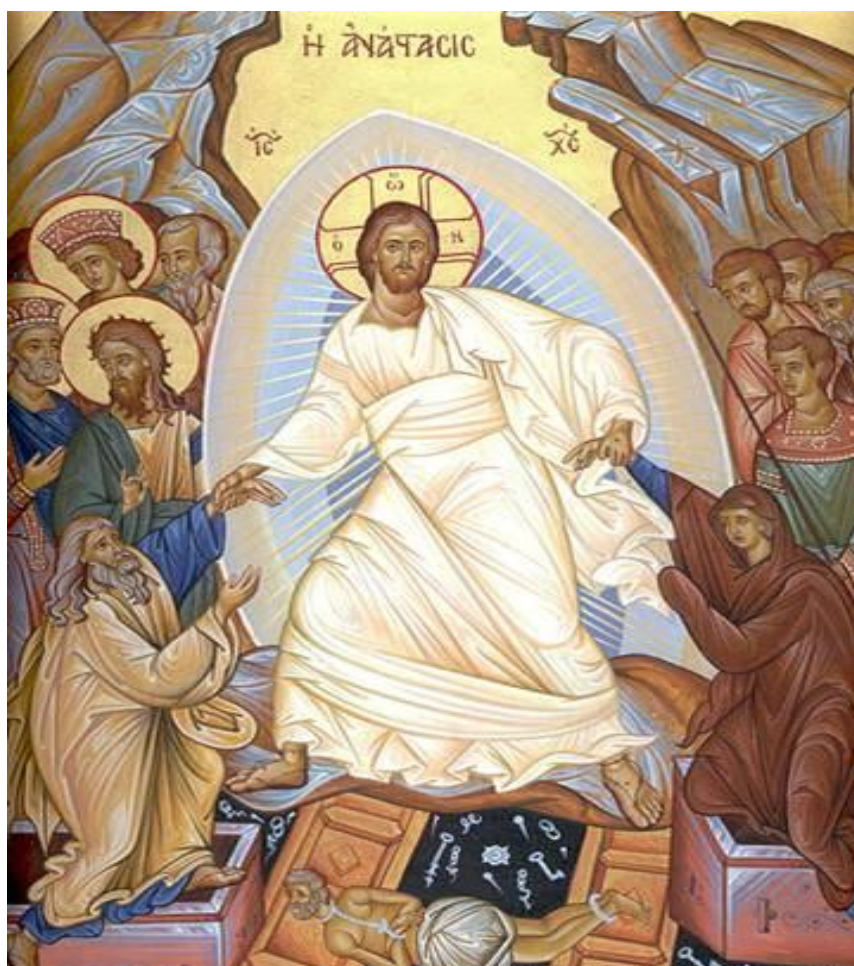


# Catholic Faith, Life & Creed

*A Complete Catechesis for Christian Living*

Breaking Open the Word  
Mary Birmingham

## Easter Sunday | Years A, B, & C



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## Begin with the Sign of the Cross

In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

### Opening Prayer

Option 1: Use Opening Prayer from the Sunday Liturgy.

Option 2: Use the prayer provided below:

#### Prayer

*God of mercy,  
You wash away our sins in water,  
You give us new birth in the Spirit,  
And redeem us in the blood of Christ.  
As we celebrate Christ's resurrection  
Increase our awareness of these blessings,  
And renew your gift of life within us.  
We ask this through our Lord Jesus Christ, your Son,  
Who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit,  
One God forever and ever.*

*[Second Sunday of Easter, Morning Prayer, Christian Prayer 452]*

Catholic  
**Faith, Life  
& Creed**  
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Word worksheets  
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## Sharing Faith

### Liturgical Context

- ▶ Easter Sunday is celebrated in the shadow of the Easter Vigil, the primary Easter feast. We are instructed to recall the baptisms of the night before and the liturgy in which salvation history is remembered and called into the present.
- ▶ Easter Sunday begins the proclamation of that first Christian community and its attempt to take the message of salvation to a waiting world.
- ▶ It takes seven weeks to tell the Easter story; this is why we say, the Second Week **of** Easter” and not the Second Sunday **after** Easter. We celebrate Easter for fifty days. All the Gospel stories told during the Easter season are part of the Easter event.

Catechist invites participants to respond to the following questions in groups of two, then surface insights in the wider group.

- ▶ What spoke to your heart in today’s liturgy?
- ▶ What reading, symbol, music, homily, spoke to you and why did it speak to you?
- ▶ What touched you the most in today’s Gospel?

If time is a consideration, omit reflection on one of the readings.

### First Reading: Acts of the Apostles. 10: 34, 37-43

- ▶ Luke is not interested in creating an historical record in the Acts of the Apostles. His intention is to record the growth of the emerging Christian community and its movement to the gentile world that eventually extended to Rome.
- ▶ Peter’s proclamation is the earliest expression of the Christian kerygma [sharing Good News].
- ▶ Peter and company were the first witnesses and were charged with passing on what they had seen and heard (as is every believer).
- ▶ Peter expresses a common theme of the early Christian kerygma: salvation was accomplished by Jesus’ death on the cross; Israel, and especially his own religious contemporaries rejected him; the apostles were the first witnesses to his post-resurrection appearances.
- ▶ Peter’s proclamation is the handing down of a living faith for every generation. His creed is found today in the Apostles Creed.
- ▶ Peter’s confession was shocking to first century listeners. Observant Jews would have found it radically absurd—association with Gentiles? Never! God would never ask such a thing. But God **was** asking and in so doing opened the door to the inclusion of and mission to Gentile believers.
- ▶ Consider the setting: An angel visited a very holy man by the name of Cornelius; the angel told Cornelius to go to Peter. AND...Peter received a vision in response

to his hunger in which four-legged animals and reptiles fell from the sky and God declared them clean—no longer were they forbidden food.

- ▶ Cornelius' entry into the Christian community and Peter's vision are a turning point for the early Church.
- ▶ The mission to the Gentiles had not yet begun in Jerusalem even though Jesus' command was to *all* the nations.
- ▶ This reading is not a mandate affirming the Gentile mission, that was a given. The obstacles were so great that a paralysis had set in—nothing short of God's own voice and vision could jump start it.
- ▶ The implications were staggering. Covenant relationship with God and one another assumed a sharing of life and hospitality. In other words, observant Christian Jews would be placed in a situation in which they would be rendered unclean by their association with Gentiles. This was a huge obstacle. Yet God was nevertheless lifting their unclean status, thus paving the way for covenant reciprocal relationship between Jew and Gentile.
- ▶ Peter breaks through the barriers of racial and ethnic divisions to proclaim the unity to which God was calling believers. Only the Spirit of Christ could accomplish so great a task!



## Mystagogy

### reflection on the mysteries

Catechist invites participants to respond to the following questions in groups of two, then surface brief insights in the wider group. Catechist responds with a “brief” story from his or her life. See appendix #1 for an example.

- ▶ Imagine the first hearers of this word! Good Jews would have been horrified that Peter was telling them that association with Gentiles no longer rendered them unclean but he was also telling them to enter into covenant relationship with them as brothers and sisters. What do we possibly have to compare this to in our own life situation today? How is this reading's challenge for our times?

## Second reading Colossians 2, 1-4

- ▶ Paul was writing to a community in crisis.
- ▶ Many believers ascribed to belief in Gnosticism (matter is evil, spirit is good).
- ▶ Some members believed themselves to be part of a spiritually elite group who possessed a special knowledge. Those who possess the knowledge can approach God; those who do not have knowledge are trapped in their evil bodies.
- ▶ The extremes of such thinking detracted from salvation through Christ.
- ▶ Paul tells us that as a result of Christ's resurrection we too have been raised with him which carries with it the responsibility to live according to the moral imperatives of the Gospel Jesus came to preach.





## Mystagogy reflection on the mysteries

Catechist invites participants to respond to the following questions in groups of two, then surface brief insights in the wider group. Catechist responds with a “brief” story from his or her life. See appendix #2 for an example.

- ▶ Mystagogy Reflection: What evidence is there in our lives that we have been raised with Christ?

OR

### Second Reading: 1 Corinthians 5, 6-8

- ▶ Leaven was a metaphor for sin and corruption.
- ▶ Unleavened bread was a sign of cleanliness and purity.
- ▶ Paul exhorts believers to destroy the old batch of leaven so a new batch can grow.
- ▶ Last night at the Easter Vigil, the old leaven was destroyed so new leaven/life could emerge. Sin was buried in the waters of rebirth.
- ▶ Paul was incredulous over the fact that the community did not seem upset over the incest that had taken place between a man and his father’s wife.
- ▶ Paul demands that the community rid itself of such sin and the tendencies to sin.
- ▶ We are to be as conscientious in ridding our lives of sin as the Jewish woman was in cleaning the house of all remaining pieces of yeast left in the house before Passover.
- ▶ Christians are called to embrace the leaven of holiness—cast off the darkness of sin.
- ▶ Two Christian Passovers are referenced in this text—the Passover of Christ from this life to life with his heavenly Father and the Passover of Christians from death to new life in Christ.



## Mystagogy reflection on the mysteries

Catechist invites participants to respond to the following questions in groups of two, surface brief insights in wider group. Catechist responds with a “brief” story from his or her life. See appendix #3 for an example.

- ▶ Mystagogy reflection: What is the greatest leaven of sin in our communities today? What would Paul ask us to rid ourselves of?

## Gospel: John 20-19

- ▶ Today's Easter Gospel does not attempt to prove the resurrection. It is a story of faith.
- ▶ There are credible claims that can be made. If the body had been taken the burial cloths would not have been left. The cloths were left as though the body within them simply vanished and in its place laid the limp cloth bindings.
- ▶ Two male witnesses attest to the resurrection (women were not valid witnesses). Peter does not initially believe. Mary Magdalene believed Jesus' body was stolen.
- ▶ No one could prove the event; at least not until Jesus started appearing to his disciples after the resurrection.
- ▶ The New Testament understood Jesus' resurrection as the premier saving event of all time—God's crowning achievement in all of salvation history.
- ▶ The full import does not come to light until Jesus' return to the throne of glory next to his Father. Thus the full implication of this Easter event will not come completely to light until Pentecost when the Spirit is sent in Christ's place.
- ▶ Jesus' death and resurrection was understood by first disciples as victory over death itself and thus could only be accepted through eyes of faith.
- ▶ It takes an entire season for us to participate in the Easter story—to enter into the dying and rising of Christ.
- ▶ Easter is a time par excellence of giving Christian witness—to testify to the great deeds of the Lord. So it was then, so it is now.



## Mystagogy

reflection on the mysteries

Catechist invites participants to respond to the following questions in small groups of four. Use the last three or four minutes to surface the insights in the wider group. Catechist begins by sharing story from his or her life. See appendix #4 for an example. (@ Ten-twelve minutes)

- ▶ How would you answer someone who challenged your belief in the resurrection? What if they asked for proof?
- ▶ What does it mean for your life that Jesus was victorious over death?
- ▶ Imagine what it was like for those first witnesses—put yourself in their shoes. You just witnessed a profound miracle or at least evidence of a profound miracle. When you try to witness to your experience you are ridiculed by friend and foe alike. What would be your response?

Catechist invites participants to silently reflect on the following question. (@ three minutes)

- After reflection on today's liturgy, what one thing is God asking of you at this time in your life?
- What obstacles stand in the way of following God's call?

## Concluding Prayer

Option 1. Celebrate a minor rite—an exorcism or blessing for catechumens: RCIA 90-97

Option 2. Pray the Prayer of Pope Clement

Option 3. Other suitable, but brief prayer. (Perhaps pray the Prayer of St. Francis.)

### Prayer of Pope Clement XI

*Lord, I believe in you: increase my faith.*

*I trust in you: strengthen my trust.*

*I love you: let me love you more and more.*

*I am sorry for my sins: deepen my sorrow.*

*I worship you as my first beginning.*

*I long for you as my last end.*

*I praise you as my constant helper.*

*And I call you as my loving protector.*

*I want to do what you ask of me:*

*In the way you ask, for as long as you ask, because you ask it.*

*Let me love you Lord as my God.*

*And see myself as I really am: a pilgrim in this world,*

*A Christian called to respect and love all those lives I touch.*

## Appendix

#1. I attended a Catholic conference once in which a beautiful Imam was invited to share and witness to his faith in God. Bigotry, hatred and misunderstanding have held God-loving and God-fearing Muslims captive to an unfair caricature. I have heard good Christian men and women condemn and spew hatred about their Muslim brothers and sisters.

This man opened my eyes. I was humbled by his faith—the faith of one of Abraham’s children. I could only hope to aspire to the holiness I witnessed in him. Every moment of every day he and his entire family consecrate and bless every waking moment. Prayer and sanctification precedes every action or event of the day. He shared with us how the word *Muslim* means *peace*. He reminded us that Mohammed promoted peace and that even though there was a brief period in which he allowed his people to defend themselves in the face of onslaught and attack, and even though for a very brief time he allowed violence he later rescinded that approval and categorically denounced the killing of others.

The Imam told us that a jihad is a holy pilgrimage; it is not a vengeance and retribution oriented quest ordained by God! He stressed how fundamentalist sects of his faith tradition have distorted their faith and assumed extreme positions regarding specific tenets of doctrine. He was very saddened that all Muslims are painted with the same violent brush, because, as he insisted, most Muslims simply love God and desire communion with him. He then witnessed to his life and faith. We were all humbled.

Today’s reading from Acts reminds me of the tension felt by those first observant Jewish Christians and by those Christians today who speak for our Muslim brothers and sisters. Unfortunately many Christians today believe that all Muslims are evil and would never consider associating with them (so much so that a clergy person in a nearby community believes it is his God-given duty to condemn them and holds teaching sessions with that very purpose in mind).

Peter invites a new evangelization of his own people. He invites them to stretch beyond what is the norm—what is comfortable—what they had always believed and see the new work God was doing. Perhaps God is asking us to open our hearts to a people he also loves—to approach them with the love he has for them and be a voice of peace for them especially in light of the fact that unfortunately some good Christian men and women seek to denounce and condemn them.

#2.

The evidence in my life that I am raised with Christ is the fact that he still calls me to be a disciple and, God be praised, I still say “yes!” Sometimes I fear that *doubt* will get the better of me and I will simply take a back seat and become lax in my



enthusiasm for the Gospel. The greatest evidence in my life that I have been *raised* is the hope I continue to carry for things yet unseen, still hoped for and anxiously awaiting. I live with someone who is very ill, but I carry the hope that one day he will be well. Hope is a sign of the resurrection. Hope carries the banner of joy in the midst of sorrow, struggle and pain.

#3,

A woman recently had a conversation with me in which she shared how she was experiencing a dark night of the soul. I could relate with her on so many levels—I was experiencing a desert time myself. In that same conversation she made a grossly unfair racial comment, totally unaware she was even making it. I wanted to say something but did not. [Shame on me.]

The encounter caused me to reflect. I wondered how many of us desire to deepen our relationship with God—to live an Easter faith in the resurrection, believe we are the holy Easter saints of this day and yet still drip with the blindness of sin in our lives. I asked myself and I asked God, what am I blind to—what do other people immediately see as my sin while I arrogantly think of myself as wonderful? I am a sinner. God saw that I am good—I just heard that again at the Easter Vigil; but I am also a sinner. Lest I forget Paul is there to remind me once again to do what is in my power to rid myself of sin with the strength of Christ to help me. This is why we need the Christian community. It is the ongoing antidote for blindness!

#4. Jesus was victorious over death. We affirm that so many times that we sometimes forget what it means. It has everything to do with our lives.

Many years ago I held my mother as she tried desperately to be weaned from a breathing machine. We breathed in the Spirit of God. She had nothing to exhale in her deteriorated state so I exhaled for her. She, who gave me life, was losing her life breath and my minimal attempts to breathe with her and for her in end were of no avail. When she took her last breath, the only truth that gave me consolation is the truth that death does not have the last word.

My mother gave birth to me, she loved me and she brought me to the font of birth and rebirth in Christ. This holy woman of faith enjoys the heritage of Christ's resurrection now, today, at this time, in this generation—not some future date. She waits in heaven for her loved ones. She is part of the eschatological banquet in heaven. She is the community in heaven that is wedded to earth and that sings, prays and worships with those of us left behind. She patiently waits to be reunited with us and we with her.

This fills me with Easter joy, not just today but each and every day of my life. Easter reminds me that Jesus made it possible for love to continue beyond the grave.



# Connecting Liturgy with Catholic Doctrine

Possible doctrinal themes that flow from this week's  
Liturgy of the Word and Eucharist

Eucharist Series  
Sacraments  
Symbols of Bread and Wine

Sacrament of Baptism  
Evangelization

Other themes may be chosen as well--choose from the index of doctrinal topics and create your own connecting statement. The following statements make the appropriate connections between the doctrinal issue you have chosen and the liturgy of the day.

## **EUCCHARIST SERIES: Part I**

Easter is to the year what Sunday is to the week. Our premier celebration of the Paschal Mystery—the life, passion, death, resurrection, ascension sending of the Spirit is made manifest and re-presented for us in the Eucharistic liturgy. For the next four weeks we will break open the four parts of the Mass. Today we will start with the Introductory Rites of the Mass.

## **SACRAMENTS**

The Paschal Mystery is made manifest in the Easter season. Easter is an appropriate time to reflect on the way in which Jesus continues his saving mission in the midst of his absence. Thus, today the doctrinal session will focus on the doctrinal issue of SACRAMENTS

## **SACRAMENT OF BAPTISM**

Last night at the Easter vigil we baptized new Christians. Easter is a time of reflection on the baptism of new converts to Christianity and the renewal of our baptism at this time of year. Through baptism we die and rise with Christ. It is an appropriate Easter reflection especially as we renew the promises we made or that were made for us at baptism.

## **SYMBOLS OF BREAD AND WINE**

Jesus continues to be present to us through the Eucharistic elements of bread and wine in the Eucharistic liturgy. Every celebration of the Eucharist is an Easter event. Thus, today we will focus our attention on the symbols of Christ's ongoing presence in the Mass—bread and wine.

## **EVANGELIZATION**

Peter professes faith in the living Christ. We are all called to express Easter faith. Today's liturgy is an invitation to recommit to the Gospel's imperative to go and share the Good News and baptize all nations. Thus today we will focus on our baptismal responsibility to go out and evangelize the world.